

White House Conference on Aging (December 11 – 14, 2005)

Independent Aging Event

Post-Event Summary Report

Name of Event: **“Building Senior-Friendly Communities in North Carolina”**

Date of Event: May 26, 2005

Location of Event: Warren Wilson College, P.O. Box 9000, Asheville, NC 28815

Number of Persons attending: 66

Sponsoring Organization(s): Land-of-Sky Regional Council Area Agency on Aging/
Land-of-Sky Regional Council Planning Department

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Please follow this format for each priority area, with the most important listed first. Please ensure that your organization's name and contact information is provided at the bottom of each page submitted.

Priority Issue #1: Public Transportation to Services

Barriers:

- Lack of funding for transportation services.
- Lack of funding for cities and towns for planning & implementation of public transportation.
- Public transit needs to cater to locations where seniors need to get to.
- Limited transportation opportunities.
- Lack of family/friends/volunteers to provide assistance.
- No affordable housing near services.
- Sprawl development mentality.
- Need for funding for sidewalks and increased frequency of public transportation.
- No land use planning.
- Commitment of decision makers to become involved with the planning & making of changes.
- Unsafe side walks creating shut-ins out of fear of falling and hurting oneself.
- Lack of knowledge and awareness of need to provide more transportation options for middle to low-income, and disabled seniors.
- The price of gas is an issue for transportation. Long traveling distances will hurt lower incomes more as gas prices rise, and the cost of public transportation will also reflect this rise in fuel costs.
- Lower density development means longer distances between affordable housing and jobs, shopping, health centers, etc.

Proposed Solution(s):

- Local Planning Councils should identify needs and advise local government.
- Public Transit should make stops at services and county/state government should pay for it, even if it is at a loss.

- Greater funding/improvements to on-demand transit system.
- Community survey to identify isolated seniors.
- Provide more convenient access to necessary services.
- Build affordable housing near hospitals, doctor's offices and shopping centers so seniors can walk to or take electric wheelchair or golf cart.
- Find greater uses for public transportation.
- Utilize volunteers to help with transportation and assistance with mileage costs.
- Transportation businesses need to be monitored for cost.
- Get commitment of key players & more involvement of seniors and government officials in the entire process.
- Single portal of entry for services—shared by service agencies.
- Roads designed for safe driving, with clear and unambiguous signage. DOT needs to study how to change roads to be more Senior Friendly.
- Borrow vans from churches that don't use the vans until Sunday.

Priority Issue #2: Affordable Housing

Barriers:

- Increases in property taxes.
- Decreases in retirement income.
- Fixed incomes.
- Rising housing costs.
- Too many apartment/housing complexes are too expensive for low-income people, especially the elderly.
- Expenses of health care/meds takes away from housing budgets.
- "Affordable" units often are dilapidated houses or mobile homes that are unsafe & inaccessible to the disabled.
- Zoning codes and ordinances.
- Crime areas.
- Many poor neighborhoods are not close to services and lack sidewalks and places to walk.
- The mountaineer attitude which worries about and hates the idea of government "meddling in affairs" around land issues.
- Showing the government there is a need.

Proposed Solution(s):

- Income-based housing complexes for elderly/disabled are a great solution, but existing complexes already have substantial waiting lists. We need more complexes for the elderly and disabled members of our community to ensure the right to safe, standard, and affordable housing.
- Encourage mixed-use development, where places to live, shop, work and worship are located within walking distance with sidewalks on every street.
- Help with developing new zoning/development codes; well-designed higher-density housing.
- Affordable housing next to shopping malls as in Denmark which would include doctor's offices and cut reliance on public transportation.
- Establish a housing trust fund that low income people can borrow from. Form a coalition of government non-profit agencies to grant money to low income families to put down payment on a house with the stipulation that they pay it back so another family could use the money.
- Have a minimum housing code requirement.
- Advertise to people in late life about leaving money behind to help with housing income issues—"affordable housing trust."
- Low cost, affordable housing (not necessarily low income) built in the city, closest to the available services.

- Public education.
- More government incentives for building affordable housing in urban areas.

Priority Issue #3: Affordable Health Care

Barriers:

- Lots of poorer seniors have to make hard decisions between their medication, their home, and their food. They often take medicine less often to save money.
- Complexity of the problem.

Proposed Solution(s):

- Education initiatives to get the word out about what is available. Get pharmacists involved. They can hand out easy to read information with prescriptions. Word of mouth is huge, maybe a telephone chain. Libraries can help. Information at senior meal sites should be available. Media and radio announcements (public service announcements).
- State prescription plans.

Priority Issue #4: Assessment of Aging Needs

Barriers:

- A clear understanding of the specific needs of aging residents.
- Bringing together the diverse interests and agendas of so many different entities—government, businesses, retirees, other residents, etc.

Proposed Solution(s):

- Agreement on strategic plans to address the needs, followed by specific action plans.
- Communication! Forums and various meetings to assess needs and identify responsibility for developing the plans and actions that will achieve the goals. Consider a survey of residents. Perhaps engage a consulting firm with close, relevant experience in this area to coordinate the analysis and planning. Once the plan is in place there are abundant resources to work on the action plan (implementation).